

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Since several years I study the occurrence of external tumours in wild birds. In these the Chaffinch Fringilla coelebs papilloma, a wart-like tumour which occurs on the legs, has my special attention. Last year we have detected in this tumour a virus which is related to the virus causing the human wart. However the Chaffinch virus is not to transmit to man. From the point of the probably viral aethiology of this tumour it would be interesting how this tumour occurs throughout the range of the Chaffinch. Therefore I have distributed an inquiry form in 16 languages to most of the European bird ringers with questions concerning the Chaffinch papilloma. The English version of the form is enclosed here.

According to some literature the Chaffinch was introduced in New Zealand and South Africa. In the latter it appears to be confined to the vicinity of Cape Town. Because these two populations are strictly isolated from the European Chaffinch populations I like to know whether this virus or tumour occurs in South Africa and New Zealand too. It has been assumed that only healthy Chaffinches were introduced. My investigation in New Zealand has resulted that until now this tumour does not occur in this country. However I like to know whether this phenomenon possibly exists in South Africa too. I do not know anything about the Chaffinches in South Africa and possibly you can give me some information about it. I hope you can give me an answer on the next questions:

1. How is the exact distribution of the Chaffinch in S.A.?
2. What is the estimated number of Chaffinches in the South African population?
3. In which year the Chaffinch was introduced.
4. If the Chaffinches have been ringed, how many?

Possibly you can refer to some literature.

Further I would ask you if you can give me the addresses of the South African bird ringers. Then I can send them the inquiry forms as I did to the European ringers.

In the near future I will send you some of my publications about these bird tumours.

I hope that you can help me with my investigation,

Sincerely yours,

P.H.C.Lina,  
Ringing station Meyendel,  
Frans Halskade 46,  
RIJSWIJK Z.H.  
Holland.

(In the absence of further letters to the Editor, we include two letters reporting recoveries. Any ringer knows the extent to which we depend on support from the public. These two letters are both excellent and demonstrate both enthusiasm and a high information content, for which we are most grateful-Ed.)

Bird found with metal plate labelled as follows  
Notify Zoo Pretoria, 643-05856

Sir,

I hereby give you a piece of information that on 24th April 1973 at around 4p.m. E.Africa standard time I picked up a bird with the label as indicated above, in a swamp of mud at a place called Kisahi in Butiaba at Lake Mobutu (Lake Albert) in Western Bunyero Dist. (Uganda)

Brief colour of the bird,

Beak black and a bit yellowish with black eyes. White neck feathers with very tiny feathers on its head, the back feathers were of black and yellowish, the tail was black with white feathers at the abdomen, it had tall thin legs which were yellowish brown with black claws. It weighed approximately less than 50gm. The aluminium plate label ring was on its right leg.

I stayed with the bird for 3 (three) days in vain of finding its food so I released it and it directed north of Butiaba. The other reason of release was I thought you had dispatched the bird to study how far that type of bird can fly in search of its food and perhaps to understand what type of weather they follow, with that it is now rainy season in my place and perhaps with more reasons than what I have said.

I hereby ask you in reply of my letter you should indicate to me where and when was the bird released and whether I did bad to release it. I hope to hear from the Zoo very soon and I hope my information will help you.

Yours sincerely,

John Kid-Kisembo,  
Kawaibanda Butiaba,  
P.O. Butiaba,  
MASINDI, Uganda

Ringling details

Ruff Philomachus pugnax Ad.male 7.9.72 Barberspan Nat.Res.  
W.Transvaal.  
26.33 S, 25.36 E

Finding details

Caught and released 24.4.73 Butiaba, Uganda.  
1.49 N, 31.19 E

Sir/Madam,

Greetings in the name of Jesus.

Usually on a Sunday morning we go down to Grassy Park where we have our Sunday school and open air church meeting. But on this Sunday 4.2.73 I had a bit of throat trouble so by 9.15 I was still in bed when some of our children come in the kitchen with a story that some little birds is hanging from a tree in somebody's back yard (next street). So I looked through our bedroom window and (sowaar) there was two little moosies hanging on cotton thread from this tree and when I saw this I jumped from my bed and my trousers and shoes was on in no time. I was on the people's roof in 4 minutes flat, with nothing to hold onto and a strong South Easter

blowing, the two little Mossies hanging above my head about 12 feet (? metres). "Bring me my fishing line." Then I tied a stone on the end and started swinging then I brought the cotton down breaking it away as it was suspended from tree to electric post. But still the birds was swinging from the tree. "Go and fetch me the crow bar," but it was to short when they tried to hand it from the ground. So I told them to fetch the stick on our washing line and I joined the two together. Offcourse with that also I could not do a thing so I tied a piece of gut on the end and tied a stone on the end and started swinging it above the birds. With that I managed to break the thread and so brought them down with the streets children shouting with joy and calling me David (with the sling). Then I climbed down and was handed the birds I dead and one alive. The dead one was wound with thread round the wing and legs, the live one was caught with thread through the slit in the ring and also over the wing and round the body. (i.e. caught by ring). I took them both home and buried the dead one after taking off your ring and let the live one loose first inside our house to see if it could fly. So my son caught it and let it fly away with a Chirp-Chirp as if to say, "Ta and thanks."

So here I enclose your ring also advise you to see if you can close it so that not even cotton thread can go through.

Ive just set loose a dove which I picked up in the street with both legs brocken. I kept it and fed it till it was all right to eat by itself and fly away. God bless you.

I remain your servant,  
Johnnie Cloete,  
30 Hugo-Naude Street,  
C.A.F.D.A. Village,  
Retreat, Cape.

#### BIRD RINGING MANUAL

The Witwatersrand Bird Club still has a few copies of the Bird Ringing Manual available at R2.00 per copy including postage. Every active ringer and trainee ringer should be in possession of a copy of this well written and comprehensive manual. Copies available from:

Mr. J. Ledger,  
P.O. Box 1038,  
JOHANNESBURG